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TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [SY](#) [IZ](#) [TU](#) [SYRIA](#)

SUBJECT: AMBASSADOR KHALILZAD'S DECEMBER 4 MEETINGS WITH FOREIGN MINISTER GUL - IRAQI ELECTIONS, SYRIA, IRAN

REF: A. STATE 219157

[B.](#) BAGHDAD 4802

[C.](#) ANKARA 7027

[D.](#) ANKARA 7098

Classified By: Consul General Deborah K. Jones, Reasons 1.4 (b and d).

¶1. (C) Summary: During a very cordial hour-long lunch sandwiched between U.S. meetings with a team of Iraqi Sunnis -- conducted in Istanbul and orchestrated and observed by the GOT -- Turkish Foreign Minister Abdullah Gul told visiting U.S. Ambassador to Iraq Khalilzad that Turkey had counseled the Sunnis that their non-participation in Iraq's electoral process suited Iran's strategic purposes. Positing that Sunni Arabs were the critical middle bloc that held Iraq's Sunni Kurds and Shi'a Arabs together, Gul said he had urged the Sunnis to accept the December 15 election date, despite encouragement from others (possibly the Egyptians and Saudis) to seek postponement. Gul said he would follow up with others during this week's OIC summit in Mecca to encourage support for Sunni participation. On Syria, Gul said he had used his recent trip to Damascus to urge full cooperation with the Mehlis investigation. Cautioning against radical transition in that country, which would lead to "a vacuum and chaos," Gul suggested the Syrians need both pressure "but to see a way out." Thus, "the U.S. should continue to push and (Turkey) will continue to pull." Gul characterized the recent visit of Iranian FM Mottaki as that "of an old friend" and said the latter was "relaxed on Iraq." Ambassador Khalilzad thanked Gul for Turkey's role in facilitating the U.S.-Sunni meetings and reiterated there would be no delay in elections and no fixed timetable for U.S. withdrawal. Khalilzad reiterated U.S. concerns about Syrian interference in Iraq and its noncompliance with UN resolutions, and agreed that Sunni non-participation played into Iranian hands. In response to the Minister's brief allusion to PKK activities, Ambassador Khalilzad suggested that a more stable situation in the Sunni heartland would enable more security resources to be deployed in the north. Gul was joined by Turkish MFA Director General for the Middle East Oguz Celikkol, the Prime Minister's advisor Professor Ahmet Davutoglu, and the Prime Minister's press counselor Nabi Avci. End Summary.

¶2. (C) Gul and Khalilzad also met briefly prior to the start of the U.S.-Sunni bilats (reported septel). Gul reviewed the issues raised by the Iraqi team during the previous evening's meeting with Gul and his advisors, and stressed Turkey's desire to contribute to the effort to ensure that all Iraqi groups participate in the electoral process. He noted that he and his advisors had made a special effort to convince the Sunnis to lower the profile of their initial demand that the December 15 polls be postponed and to focus instead on technical issues that could be addressed in the run-up to the election. Here Gul suggested that the Iraqi Sunnis might have been receiving "bad advice" from the Saudis and Egyptians with respect to delaying the elections. Khalilzad expressed appreciation for Gul's initiative in organizing the meeting and stressed that the U.S. shares the goal of broad participation. He underscored election postponement is not under consideration.

¶3. (C) During the lunch, Khalilzad characterized his morning dialog with the Iraqis as open and frank, noting that "while we can't deliver on everything," the Sunnis had raised a number of legitimate technical concerns which could be pursued, including the question of international monitors. He added that discussion of a withdrawal timetable had been raised, but that he had stressed that an artificial timetable would be counterproductive; both sides needed to focus instead on achieving the conditions necessary for withdrawal.

At the end of the day, the Ambassador speculated, the Sunnis would want the U.S. to stay (which he added is not our intention), a point with which Gul concurred. Khalilzad stressed that the U.S. goal is an Iraq that works and in which all elements of society participate; the Sunnis could not continue to dwell in the past or dream of a return to the status quo ante. Gul agreed, stressing that only the participation of "all three pillars" of Iraqi society would create a healthy polity and suggesting that the Sunni Arabs held communalities with Iraq's Kurds, as Sunnis, and Iraq's Shi'a, as Arabs, that were necessary to hold the country together.

¶4. (C) Gul also raised the political challenges facing the Sunnis, and the need for them to have "concrete things" to

present to their constituencies to bring them along. That said, the Minister and Ambassador agreed that it is particularly important to disabuse the Sunnis of the notion that participating in the election is a favor to the rest of Iraqi society. Other elements (read Iran, *inter alia*) are happy to see the Sunnis outside the process, and are taking advantage of their absence for their own purposes. Gul said he had warned the Iraqis that they were playing into the hands of their opponents, "who did not wish to see the real representatives of the Sunnis." Only from within the system, he agreed, could they influence the final shape of Iraq's constitutional system. Khalilzad suggested that a government of national unity might be the optimum outcome from the upcoming elections. Gul agreed, judging that this would offer all parties some "ownership" of the process.

15. (C) Syria and Iran: In response to Ambassador Khalilzad's concerns over Syrian misbehavior and Iranian mischief in Iraq, and the Ambassador's reiteration of points contained ref A, Gul said he had delivered a strong message to Asad during his recent meetings in Damascus, warning him to abandon his rhetoric, cooperate with the U.N. investigation and do more on the Iraqi border. "We must keep the pressure on," he agreed, but "we must also show the way out," since "dramatic change" in Syria would lead to a "vacuum and chaos." With pressure and encouragement, he argued, the Syrians would change: "You should continue to push and we will pull." Gul opined that Syria's Economic Minister was "serious" and that economic reform in Syria would bring political changes in its wake. On Iran, Gul said Foreign Minister Mottaki had been "relaxed" about Iraq during his recent visit to Ankara (ref C), but agreed with Ambassador Khalilzad's observation that the Iranians have been playing a divisive game in Iraq, permitting extremists to infiltrate the north of the country, while also encouraging Shiite sectarianism.

16. (C) PKK: In a passing reference to the PKK, Gul argued that it is "essential" that it be addressed to counteract the perception some have that the U.S. does not view all terrorists with the same seriousness. Khalilzad expressed hope that when the security situation stabilizes in the Sunni heartland, security resources could be refocused to address PKK concerns.

17. (SBU) Press Event: At the conclusion of the luncheon, based on a progress report on ongoing U.S.-Sunni meetings led by Baghdad Political Counselor Robert Ford and other members of the U.S. delegation, the Minister and Ambassador Khalilzad agreed to a joint press conference (photo op and brief statement) to announce the fact of the meeting and to stress the determination of all sides to work to ensure broad participation in the elections. In his remarks to the press, Gul emphasized Turkey's interest in seeing an "Iraq that moves forward" and the GOT's efforts to encourage all groups, including those that did not participate in the referendum, to take part in the December 15 poll. "This is a process," he emphasized, to which Turkey is "determined to contribute." Ambassador Khalilzad thanked Gul for his leadership in convening the meeting, and for the "role Turkey has played and has promised to continue playing." He stressed that the United States is committed to work as hard as it can to facilitate the participation of all Iraqis in the election, and that the meeting with the Sunni delegation was part of that process. "We want an Iraq that can stand on its own feet," the Ambassador said, and for that to happen "all of Iraq's communities need to agree." Tariq Hashemi, leader of the Sunni Iraq Islamic Party and designated spokesman for the Sunni team, also expressed appreciation for "Turkey's role in Iraq," and noted that important issues had been tabled for discussion, specifically the request for cessation of bombing of civilian centers in the run-up to the elections; the question of observers, and a request that the election be postponed. He thanked Ambassador Khalilzad for his open-minded attitude, and stressed the Sunnis' desire to participate in the election, to be represented in the assembly and government, and to have a "genuine role" in the political process. He concluded, however, that this is subject to a healthy environment, which he said would not be achieved without "American consideration of our concerns."

18. (C) Comment: The bilateral U.S.-Sunni meetings, while useful, produced no breakthroughs. The real winner here was Prime Minister Erdogan's government, which clearly wanted to signal to us, the Iraqis, and the Turkish public its efforts to contribute to stability in neighboring Iraq and raise its profile as a key regional player. End Comment.

19. (U) This message was cleared by Ambassador Khalilzad.
JONES